TESTIMONY

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TESTIMONY

Defeating Terrorist Groups

SETH G. JONES

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September 2008

Testimony presented before the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities on September 18, 2008

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***Defeating Terrorist Groups*[2]**

Before the Committee on Armed Services
Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities
United States House of Representatives

September 18, 2008

There has been a great deal of work on why individuals or groups resort to terrorism. There has also been a growing literature on whether terrorism "works." But there has been virtually no systematic analysis by policymakers or academics on how terrorism *ends*. This gap is troubling. Seven years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States cannot continue conducting an effective counter-terrorism campaign against al Qa'ida without understanding how terrorist groups end.

I. How Terrorist Groups End

To help fill this gap, Martin Libicki and I examined 648 terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006. We found that they ended for two major reasons: members decided to adopt non-violent tactics and join the political process (43 percent of the time), or local police and intelligence agencies arrested or killed key members of the group (40 percent). Military force has rarely been the primary reason how terrorist groups have ended (10 percent), and few groups have ever achieved victory (7 percent). The results are also revealing for religious groups, as shown in Figure 2. Only 16 percent have ended because of military force, and another 11 percent have ended because they joined the political process. By far the most effective strategy against religious groups has been the use of local police and intelligence services, which were responsible for the end of 73 percent of groups since 1968.

Figure 1: How Terrorist Groups End

Military Force
7%

Victory
10%

Policing /
Intelligence
40%

Politics
43%

Figure 2: How Religious Groups End

Military Force
16%

Politics
11%

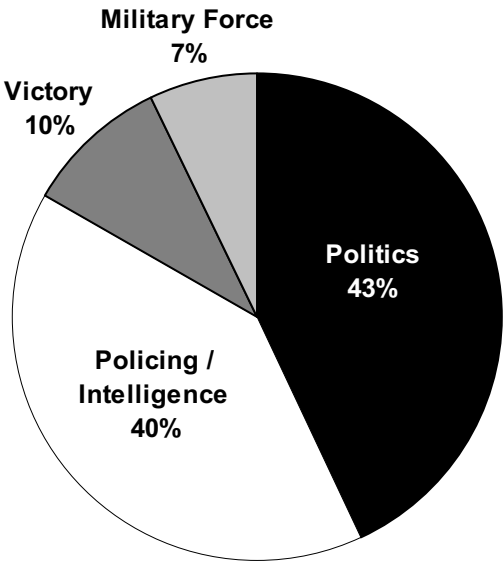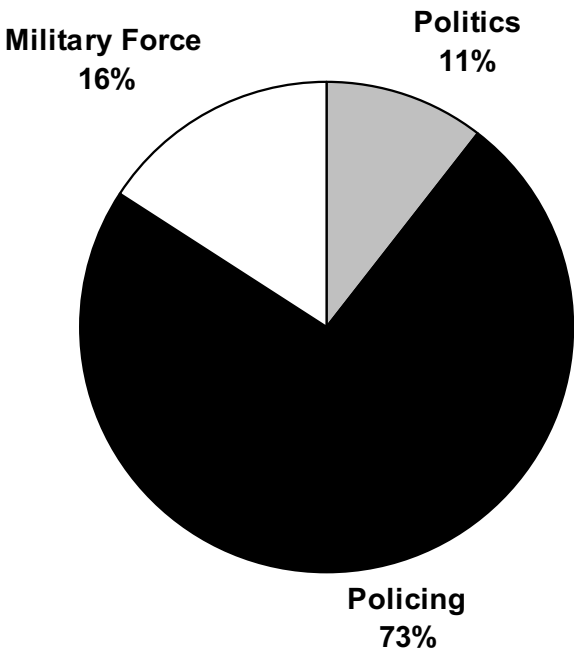Policing
73%

Other key findings included:

- Religious terrorist groups take longer to eliminate than other groups. Approximately 62 percent of all terrorist groups have ended since 1968, but only 32 percent of religious groups have ended.
- Religious groups rarely achieve their objectives. No religious group has achieved victory since 1968.
- Size is a significant determinant of a group's fate. Big groups of more than 10,000 members have been victorious more than 25 percent of the time, while victory is rare when groups are smaller than 1,000 members.
- There is no statistical correlation between the duration of a terrorist group and ideological motivation, economic conditions, regime type, or the breadth of terrorist goals. But there appears to be some correlation between the size of a terrorist group and duration: Larger groups tend to last longer than smaller groups.
- When a terrorist group becomes involved in an insurgency, it does not end easily. Nearly 50 percent of the time, groups ended by negotiating a settlement with the government; 25 percent of the time, they achieved victory; and 19 percent of the time, military forces defeated them.
- Terrorist groups from upper-income countries are much more likely to be left-wing or nationalist and much less likely to be motivated by religion.

II. Lessons from Pakistan

While United States and local efforts have been mixed against al Qa'ida in Pakistan and Iraq, there have been some bright spots. These successes were often because the United States worked by, with, and through local police and intelligence services. These efforts provide some insight into what has worked – and what might work – against al Qa'ida in the future.

In Pakistan, several examples since 2001 illustrate the point. One is the capture of Abu Zubeida, a Palestinian who became al Qa'ida's operational commander after Muhammad Atef's death in 2001. After September 11, 2001, Abu Zubeida fled to Pakistan but remained elusive. Through patient intelligence and police work, Pakistan government officials learned about his movements by capturing lower-level operatives. The CIA assisted in the location of the sites through technical intelligence, such as monitoring and tracing his cell phone calls. He moved among 13 major sites in three cities: nine in Faisalbad, one in Karachi, and three in Lahore. On March 27, 2002, Pakistan intelligence and law enforcement agents raided all 13 sites simultaneously. The mission was successful: Zubeida was captured along with 27 of his al Qa'ida associates.

Pakistani intelligence and police officials were also critical in the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Working with Pakistani intelligence agents, the CIA tracked Khalid Sheikh Mohammed using a series of informants in Pakistan. Pakistani intelligence agents spotted an associate of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad at Islamabad International Airport on the morning of February 28, 2003. He was scheduled to meet Khalid Sheikh Mohammad that evening. A well-placed informant told Pakistan intelligence that he would be using two houses on Peshawar Road in Rawalpindi. Pakistan and U.S. officials drew up plans to arrest them alive. At 1:45 a.m. the next morning, Pakistan intelligence agents and law enforcement officials – with the assistance of the CIA – broke the doors of the houses down, rushed in, and arrested Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and other associates such as Mustafa al-Hawsawi. As CIA Director George Tenet later recalled, the relationship between the CIA and Pakistani police and intelligence officials was critical: "Just after [Khalid Sheikh Mohammad's] capture, I left on a trip to a half-dozen Middle Eastern countries. Among my stops was Islamabad. I wanted to personally thank the courageous Pakistani security officials who had captured KSM, and indeed I gave several of them CIA medals."

The capture of Abu Faraj al-Libbi, one of al Qa'ida's top leaders, also illustrates the effectiveness of this model. He came to Afghanistan in the early 1990s after Soviet forces had departed, and became a pioneer member of al Qa'ida. Following the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed on March 1, 2003, Libbi took his place in the al Qa'ida hierarchy. In 2005, Pakistani intelligence agents managed to "turn" one of Libbi's colleagues and use him as an informant. The CIA was also involved in tracking Libbi. Pakistani agents had the informant arrange a meeting with Libbi. After repeated failures, Libbi agreed to a meeting in Mardan in the North West Frontier Province in May 2005. Pakistan intelligence planned the operation. The meeting place was a dark graveyard that had a shrine visited by numerous worshipers. Three Pakistani intelligence agents put on burqas. Libbi arrived and got off his bike at a notable distance from the meeting point. For some reason, he broke with his usual pattern of sending in a decoy first, and started walking toward the informant. The moment Libbi came close to one of the burka-clad agents, "she" jumped up and grabbed Libbi.

In sum, the most effective operations in Pakistan since 2001 have been ones where U.S. intelligence and Special Operations Forces have worked by, with, and through local police and intelligence agencies. The same has been true in Iraq.

III. Turning the Tide in Iraq

U.S. operations in Anbar Province provide another useful illustration of this model of working with local police and intelligence. In October 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of al Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) who was killed by U.S. forces in June 2006, pledged loyalty to Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden returned the favor by anointing Zarqawi his representative in Iraq. AQI's thrust for leadership of the Sunni insurgent movement was first made evident in the January 2006 formation of the Mujahedeen Shura Council. The council included AQI as its de facto core, plus the Victorious Sect brigade and four lesser-known allied groups. In October 2006, AQI formed yet another front group, merging the Mujahedeen Shura Council with several other groups. The result was the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq, which took the first step toward al Qa'ida's goal of establishing a caliphate in the region.

The creation of the Islamic State of Iraq had several putative motivations. It was an attempt to encourage other Sunni insurgent groups to pledge alliance to al Qa'ida and co-opt the Sunni jihadist movement. By claiming to be a state, AQI sought to gain legitimacy. To accomplish its goals, the Islamic State of Iraq utilized brutal tactics. Sheikh Hareth Zaher al-Dhari, son of the head of al-Zouba' tribe, was assassinated, an act attributed to his organization's refusal to join the Islamic State of Iraq. AQI's use of murder and intimidation extended beyond Sunni insurgent groups and extended to the various tribes of Anbar. Many were initially opposed to the U.S. intervention, but wary of a theocratic ideology that left little room for tribal authority. Although some tribal sheiks allied themselves with al Qa'ida, others decamped to Jordan and Syria. The few that remained saw their ranks decimated by repeated attacks. One such sheik, Abdul Sattar Buzaigh al-Rishahwi of the influential Rishawi tribe of Ramadi, lost his father and several brothers to AQI. In the summer of 2006, AQI refused to relinquish his body for burial until days had passed, contravening Islamic tradition.

Aided by the recoil of sheiks to this act, Sheik Sattar, organized 25 of the 31 tribes in Anbar to join the Anbar Salvation Council in September 2006. The sheiks set themselves up as public enemies of AQI. Their primary strategy was to persuade young tribal men to join the police forces of Ramadi and other Anbar towns to help take back the province, in return for protection by U.S. forces. It took several months for the alliance to build its critical strength. As promised, the sheiks persuaded tribal members to join the local police in large numbers.

By December 2006, the Ramadi police force had doubled in size from 4,000 to a plateau of 8,000. In western Anbar, the number of police went from nearly zero to 3,000. The police force in the province grew to 24,000 in mid-2007, with a goal of leveling off at 30,000. U.S. forces, whose policy

was to place their officers within newly formed police units, could not staff up as fast as police units were growing. Perhaps the most significant change was that the new police, in contrast to their predecessors, were willing to fight. As recently as August 2006, half of the police officers in Fallujah stayed home in the face of AQI threats. By January, they were standing their ground. A simultaneous alienation of other insurgent groups also became visible. Competing insurgent groups had seen their ranks depleted by defections, and their leadership attacked and assassinated. AQI's growing dominance of organized crime cut into the revenues that competing groups counted on. Furthermore, whereas all the major insurgent groups employed the Salafi discourse, none but AQI made the restoration of the caliphate their primary or even preferred objective.

A large share of the new policemen were formerly members of insurgent groups. One sheik, Abu Azzam, said the 2,300 men in his movement included members of fierce Sunni groups like the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade and the Mujahedeen Army, which had fought U.S. forces. For several months, the Anbar Salvation Council battled with AQI, primarily in the Ramadi area. In the absence of set-piece battles – the new police forces lacked heavy weaponry of their own – conflict was conducted through constant attrition. The police rounded up those who were AQI members. And AQI extended its intimidation campaign against police, their families, and the tribal sheiks who had turned against them. The results of this shift were dramatic. By March 2007, al Qa'ida had largely been expelled from Ramadi, a city that had been a no-man's land for U.S. and Iraqi forces. Except for Fallujah, the number of attacks in Anbar fell dramatically. U.S. deaths, which were running roughly 30 a month in the entire province, fell to three in June 2007.

Sunni groups did the bulk of the work, not U.S. military forces. The U.S. part of the bargain was to provide intelligence to Sunni groups and protection to the sheiks and their entourage, most visibly by parking a tank outside their compounds. The sheiks, in turn, promised to persuade tribal members to join the police forces of Ramadi and other Anbar towns. Some reports credited the U.S. military for having convinced the Anbar sheiks to cooperate. They certainly pushed the project forward, but the U.S. role was more as a catalyst. The sheiks had reasons of their own to oppose AQI, which had killed many family members, cut into their operations (such as smuggling), and whose concept of governance was antithetical to tribal authorities.

IV. Ending the 'War' on Terrorism

The U.S. strategy after September 2001 was not effective in significantly weakening al Qa'ida by 2008. Some have argued that an effective strategy against al Qa'ida should include a broad range of tools that target the demand and supply side of the organization. As Rohan Gunaratna argued, for example, this strategy includes sanctions against state sponsors; the use of military and police

forces against al Qa'ida's leaders, members, collaborators, and supporters; the resolution of regional conflicts in such locations as Kashmir and Palestinian territory; redressing grievances and meeting the legitimate aspirations of Muslims; and countering al Qa'ida's ideology.[3] Similarly, Daniel Byman noted that "there is no single strategy that can successfully defeat the jihadists. All heads of the hydra of terrorism must be attacked."[4]

A comprehensive strategy should indeed include a range of tools. The problem, however, is that a "kitchen sink" approach doesn't prioritize a finite amount of resources and attention. Nor does it provide an assessment of what is most likely to be effective (and what is not). For example, economic sanctions are rarely effective in changing the behavior of other states, including issues related to terrorism.[5] In addition, the resolution of conflicts in such places as Kashmir and Palestinian territory may take generations, and are not primary reasons for al Qa'ida's existence or support. We must therefore look elsewhere for an effective strategy that helps prioritize resources and attention. While numerous terrorist groups have ended because of a political solution, al Qa'ida's broad goals make this unlikely. Since its goal remains the establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate, there is little reason to expect that a negotiated settlement with governments in the Middle East is possible.

Based on our analysis of how terrorist groups end, a more effective approach would be adopting a two-front strategy. First, policing and intelligence should be the backbone of U.S. efforts. In Europe, North America, North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, al Qa'ida consists of an amorphous network of individuals that need to be tracked down and arrested. In Pakistan, for example, the most successful efforts to capture or kill al Qa'ida leaders after the September 2001 attacks – such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, Ramzi Binalshibh, Abu Faraj al-Libbi, and Abu Zubeida – occurred because of careful police and intelligence work, not military force. This strategy should include careful work abroad from such organizations as the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigations, as well as their cooperation with local police and intelligence agencies.

Second, military force is a necessary component when al Qa'ida is directly involved in an insurgency, but not necessarily American military force. Even in these cases, local military forces

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[3] Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qa'ida: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), pp308-322. Also see Gunaratna, "Combating Al-Qa'ida and Associated Groups," in Doron Zimmermann and Andreas Wenger, eds, *How States Fight Terrorism: Policy Dynamics in the West* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 2007), pp. 175-202.
[4] Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: Wiley, 2008), p. 44.
[5] See, for example, Robert Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Fall 1997, pp. 90-136; Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Still Do Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 1998, pp. 66-77; T. Clifton Morgan and Valerie L. Schwebach, "Fools Suffer Gladly: The Use of Economic Sanctions in International Crises," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 27-50; David Cortright and George A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

frequently have more legitimacy to operate than the United States and a better understanding of the operating environment. This means a light U.S. footprint or none at all. The U.S. military can play a critical role in building indigenous capacity, but should generally resist being drawn into combat operations in Muslim countries where its presence is likely to increase terrorist recruitment.

The backbone of this two-front strategy should include focusing on careful police and intelligence work at home and abroad. This would include ending the notion of a "war" on terrorism and replacing it with phrases such as "counter-terrorism," which are used by most governments with a significant terrorism problem. This change might seem pedantic, but would have significant symbolic importance. Moving away from military references would indicate that there was no battlefield solution to countering terrorism. Individuals such as Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden should be viewed and described as criminals, not as holy warriors.

In Britain, for example, the government shunned the phrase "war on terror" despite a long history of dealing with such terrorist groups as the IRA. Hilary Benn, Britain's international development secretary, argued that the phrase suggests that only military measures could be a useful response. "In the UK," he noted, "we do not use the phrase 'war on terror' because we can't win by military means alone and because this isn't one organized enemy with a clear identity and a coherent set of objectives."[6] The phrase raises public expectations – both in the United States and abroad – that there was a battlefield solution to the problem of terrorism. Similarly, the French government refused to refer to counterterrorism efforts as a war, arguing that the phrase legitimized the terrorists.[7] Even in Australia, government officials eschewed the use of the term "war on terror."

V. Policing and Intelligence

This strategy should include rebalancing U.S. resources and attention on police and intelligence work. It also means increasing budgets at the CIA, Department of Justice, and State Department, and scaling back the Department of Defense's focus and resources on counter-terrorism. U.S. Special Operations Forces will remain critical, as will U.S. military operations to counter terrorist groups involved in insurgencies.

This also requires the development of a strategy with police and intelligence as its backbone. Unlike the military, local police and intelligence agencies usually have a permanent presence in cities and towns, a better understanding of local groups, and human sources. As Bruce Hoffman argued, a critical step in countering terrorist groups is for law enforcement officials to "develop

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[6] Jane Perlez, "Briton Criticizes U.S.'s Use of 'War on Terror,'" *New York Times*, April 17, 2007, p. 10.
[7] Seth Jones interview with members of France's Anti-Terrorism Coordination Unit, or UCLAT (l'unite de coordination de la lutte anti-terroriste), January 22, 2008.

strong confidence-building ties with the communities from which terrorists are most likely to come or hide in … The most effective and useful intelligence comes from places where terrorists conceal themselves and seek to establish and hide their infrastructure."[8] Some have argued that history has little to offer, since al Qa'ida's global breadth and decentralized organizational structure make it somewhat different from many other terrorist organizations, even religious ones. As Rohan Gunaratna argued: "Because there is no historical precedent for al Qa'ida, the past offers very little guidance."[9] But this is not true. While al Qa'ida is different from many other terrorist organizations because of its global reach, its *modus operandi* is not atypical. Like other groups, its members need to communicate with each other, raise funds, build a support network, plan and execute attacks, and establish a base (or bases) of operations. Most of these nodes are vulnerable to penetration by police and intelligence agencies. The downside of this development is that eliminating key nodes in multiple places in more difficult than doing it in one country.

Indeed, its organizational structure makes it vulnerable to a policing and intelligence strategy. This structure includes a "bottom up" approach (encouraging independent thought and action from low-level operatives) and a "top down" one (issuing orders and still coordinating a far-flung terrorist enterprise with both highly synchronized and autonomous moving parts). Al Qa'ida is a broad network. Successfully targeting this network requires a painstaking process of collecting intelligence on al Qa'ida, penetrating cells, and eventually arresting or killing its key members. As Mark Sageman argued, the most effective tools to defeating al Qa'ida and the global Salafi jihad "simply amount to good police work."[10] Unlike a hierarchical organization that can be eliminated through decapitation of its leadership, a network resists fragmentation because of its dense interconnectivity. A significant fraction of nodes can be randomly removed without much impact on its integrity. A network is vulnerable, however, at its hubs. If enough hubs are destroyed, the network breaks down into isolated, non-communicating islands of nodes.[11] Hubs in a social network are vulnerable because most communications go through them. With good intelligence, law enforcement authorities should be able to identify and arrest these hubs. This includes intercepting and monitoring terrorist communications through telephone, landline phone, e-mail, facsimiles, and Internet chat rooms, as well as tracking couriers used by al Qa'ida officials in places such as Pakistan.

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[8] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 169.
[9] Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qa'ida: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), p. 296.
[10] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 175.
[11] On networks and terrorism, see Seth G. Jones, "Fighting Networked Terror Groups: Lessons from Israel," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2007, pp. 281-302; Brian A. Jackson, "Groups, Networks, or Movements: A Command-and-Control-Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qa'ida," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3, April-May 2006, pp. 241-162.

Police and intelligence services are best placed to implement these activities. This approach can include a range of steps: intelligence collection and analysis; capture of key leaders; and legal and other measures.

Intelligence collection and analysis: The first is intelligence collection and analysis. Intelligence is the principal source of information on terrorists. The police and intelligence agencies have a variety of ways to identify terrorists, including signals intelligence (such as monitoring cell phone calls) and human intelligence (such as using informants to penetrate cells). Human intelligence can provide some of the most useful actionable intelligence. But it requires painstaking work in recruiting informants who are already in terrorist organizations, or placing informants not yet in them.

This means monitoring key individuals within al Qa'ida central, as well as such key hubs in places like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, and the United Kingdom. The head of United Kingdom's Security Service, MI-5, noted in late 2007 that his organization identified at least 2,000 individuals "who we believed posed a direct threat to national security and public safety, because of their support for terrorism." Most were al Qa'ida inspired or assisted.[12] The greatest priority should be extensive penetration of terrorist networks. Recruitment of agents in place is sometimes difficult because of the strong emotional bonds among members of terrorist networks, making them reluctant to betray their friends and their faith. Local police and intelligence services are often better placed to recruit informants in al Qa'ida cells. In 2008, MI-5 estimated that it took roughly 18 months on average for an individual to become radicalized enough to conduct an attack. That period is fundamental for police and intelligence services to identify suspects, collect information, and arrest them.

The best avenue for penetration often lies in recruiting from the pool of those who went through training but decided not to join the jihad, or others who might associate with jihadists in places like mosques. In the 2007 plot to target John F. Kennedy International Airport, for example, New York law enforcement officials recruited an informant who attended the same Brooklyn mosque as Russell Defreitas, one of the suspects. Defreitas said he met the informant from attending services at the mosque, took him into his confidence, and slowly disclosed his plan to attack Kennedy.[13] Imams of conservative or fundamentalist mosques who reject terrorism could be excellent sources of information on their congregations. They would be valuable allies to recruit because they often

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[12] Jonathan Evans, "Address to the Society of Editors' 'A Matter of Trust' Conference" (London: Security Service, November 5, 2007).

[13] See United States of America Against Russel Defreitas (also known as "Mohammed"), Kareem Ibrahim (also known as "Amir Kareem"), Abdul Kadir, and Abdel Nur, Under Seal Complaint, United States District Court, Eastern District of New York; U.S. Department of Justice, *Four Individuals Charged in Plot to Bomb John F. Kennedy International Airport* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2007); New York Police Department, *Threat Analysis: JFK Airport / Pipeline Plot* (New York: New York Police Department, June 2, 2007).

know which member of their congregations are relatives or former friends of suspected terrorists. However, this radicalization doesn't always occur at mosques, since jihadists have become adept at evading detection. Mohammed Siddique Khan radicalized his group in the back of a van. Others may become radicalized in bookshops, on camping trips, or in other venues.

In Afghanistan, for example, police and intelligence officials focused on working with imams at mosques to counter Taliban and al Qa'ida recruitment efforts. As an Afghan intelligence report concluded: "The ease which the Taliban use the mullahs against us [needs to] be challenged." Consequently, the report concluded that "this requires establishment of [a] relationship with every significant mullah in the country … We should put our weight behind the nationalist ones and not allow the militant or fanatic ones to take over. This is only possible if we keep the nationalist ones on our pay-rolls."[14]

Since social bonds play a critical role in al Qa'ida's network, friends and relatives of identified terrorists need to be pursued and investigated wherever they reside. Especially important are those who were friends of a terrorist just before he or she started jihad, such as traveling to Pakistan for training. These friends may have helped transform him or her from an alienated Muslim into a dedicated terrorist. Arresting key individuals would degrade the network into isolated units or cliques. They would be less capable of mounting complex, large-scale operations because they lacked expertise, logistical support, and financial support. Small-scale terrorist operations are difficult to end. But without spectacular successes to sustain their motivation, isolated operators would lose their enthusiasm. And it would reduce terrorism to simple criminality. Winning the media war to label terrorists as criminals is especially important, and virtually impossible to do in the face of a strategy based on military force.[15]

Working with local police and intelligence agencies is critical. They generally have better training and information to penetrate and disrupt terrorist organizations. They are the primary arm of the government focused on internal security matters.[16] Their mission should be to penetrate and seize terrorists and other criminals – their command structure, members, logistics support, and financial and political support – from the midst of the population. Local police and intelligence know the language, people, culture, and terrain better than U.S. agencies do. To paraphrase a U.S. Special Forces mantra, this strategy requires working "by, with, and through" local security forces.

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[14] Amrullah Saleh, *Strategy of Insurgents and Terrorists in Afghanistan* (Kabul: National Directorate for Security, 2006), p. 16.
[15] Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, pp. 175-184.
[16] Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, trans. Daniel Lee (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 43; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Hailer Publishing, 2005), p. 31.

Human intelligence is preferable since there are limitations to using technological means to monitor al Qa'ida movements. One good example is al Qa'ida's courier system. Al Qa'ida adopted a four-tiered courier system to communicate among key member of the group and minimize detectability. Many al Qa'ida leaders have become more cautious in using cell phones, satellite phones, e-mail, and other forms of communication that could easily be tracked by foreign intelligence services. The administrative courier network dealt with communication pertaining to the movement of al Qa'ida members' families and other administrative activities. The operational courier network dealt with operational instructions. Where possible, unwitting couriers were substituted for knowledgeable people to minimize detection. The media courier network was used for propaganda. Messages were sent in the form of CDs, videos, and leaflets to television networks such as al Jazeera. The final courier network was used only by al Qa'ida's top leadership, who usually did not pass written messages to each other to maximize secrecy. Normally, their most trusted couriers memorized messages and conveyed them verbatim.[17] The use of a sophisticated courier network places a premium on recruiting informants already in these organizations, or placing informants in them.

For the United States, this approach requires providing foreign assistance to police and intelligence services abroad to improve their counterterrorism capacity. This means relying on the efforts of law enforcement and internal security forces of states where al Qa'ida is operating. The U.S. can help bolster the police and intelligence capabilities of foreign police and intelligence services abroad, as well as share intelligence information. Key locations where al Qa'ida has a foothold include Europe (such as Britain and the Netherlands), Algeria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The effort against al Qa'ida will hinge on the competence of local police and intelligence services in these countries to collect information, penetrate al Qa'ida cells, arrest or kill its members, and counter its propaganda machine. Working with locals is sometimes easier said than done, since not all states may cooperate. As Harvard law professor Philip Heymann argued: "Some states will lack the competence to really help, and states that do not believe in the cause will make efforts too half-hearted to be effective but real enough to be indistinguishable from sanctionable incompetence."[18] This is where other strategies, such as diplomacy and economic sanctions, can be useful in coercing states to support U.S. interests. In some cases, limited direct action may be inevitable.

Capture of key leaders: Next is the capture of key leaders and their support network. In democratic countries, this involves capturing key members and presenting the evidence in court. Terrorism involves the commission of violent crimes such as murder and assault. The investigation,

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[17] Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 221.
[18] Philip B. Heymann, "Dealing with Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Winter 2001/02, p. 34.

trial, and punishment of perpetrators should be a matter for the wider criminal justice system.[19] The barriers can sometimes be significant. Finding evidence that can be presented in court, but that doesn't reveal sensitive information about sources and methods, can be challenging. This is especially true if a terrorist hasn't perpetrated an attack yet. In many cases, it may be easier and more effective to arrest and punish terrorists for other offenses, such as drug-trafficking, that have little direct connection to their terrorist activity. As one member of the French government's Anti-Terrorism Coordination Unit told us: "We have frequently detained possible terrorists for a number of crimes – such as criminal activity – that have little or nothing to do with terrorism. We can often build stronger legal cases against individuals by focusing on other crimes they have committed. The problem, of course, is that the punishment may be less severe."[20] In non-democratic countries, the policing approach is often drastically different because laws and norms of behavior may be different. Consequently, Pakistani and Saudi police and intelligence agencies have frequently used repressive measures to target al Qa'ida terrorists operating in their countries.[21]

The capture of terrorists – both low-level and high-level – is often a good source of information on leaders. Diaries, cell phones, and lap tops can provide crucial information on code names of other terrorists, real names, addresses, phone numbers, and plans. For example, the 2004 capture of Abu Talha al-Pakistani (also known as Muhammad Naeem Noor Khan) led to a gold mine of information on al Qa'ida terrorist plots for the Pakistan government, United States, and other countries. He was a Pakistani national who was born in Karachi and earned a bachelor's degree in computer engineering in 2002. In March 2002, he was recruited by Khalid Sheik Mohammad. After two top al Qa'ida leaders – Ammar al-Balochi and Khallad bin Attash – were captured, Abu Talha became a key al Qa'ida official in Karachi. He was involved in training al Qa'ida operatives in Shakai, Pakistan. During this time he remained closely associated with such al Qa'ida leaders as Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, Hamza al-Jawfi, Faraj al-Libbi, and Abu Musaab al-Balochi. With help from the CIA, who had been tracking him, Pakistani intelligence arrested him on July 13, 2004. He – and his laptop – were a gold mine of information, and gave Pakistan, the United States, and other countries vital information on al Qa'ida operations. His laptop contained the plans of Issa al-Hindi (also known as Dhiren Barot), a senior member of al Qa'ida who was arrested by British authorities for plotting attacks in the United States and UK. Khalid Sheik Mohammad acknowledged under interrogation that he told Abu Talha to carry out reconnaissance of, and prepare a plan to attack, Heathrow Airport. After initial planning, Abu Talha also suggested Canary Wharf and London's

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[19] See, for example, Lindsay Clutterbuck, "Law Enforcement," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp. 142-144.
[20] Seth Jones interview with member of France's Anti-Terrorism Coordination Unit, or UCLAT (l'unite de coordination de la lutte anti-terroriste), June 27, 2007.
[21] On the dilemmas of U.S. assistance to the police of non-democratic countries, see Seth G. Jones et al, *Securing Tyrants or Fostering Reform? U.S. Internal Security Assistance to Repressive and Transitioning Regimes* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).

subway system as additional targets. Access to Abu Talha's computer after his capture showed that their well-advanced plans included attacks on the headquarters of Citigroup and the Prudential Insurance Group in New York, the United Nations headquarters in New York, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank buildings in Washington.[22]

Legal and other measures: The third step is the development and passage of legal measures. This can involve criminalizing activities that are necessary for terrorist groups to function, such as raising money or recruiting members. It can also involve passing laws that make it easier for the intelligence and police services to conduct searches, engage in electronic surveillance, interrogate suspects, and monitor groups that pose a terrorist threat. It can include efforts to protect witnesses, juries, and judges from threats and intimidation. In democratic states, this inevitably leads to tension between civil liberties and security. As one scholar argued, "a democratic nation wants life, liberty, and unity as the products of its policies for dealing with terrorism, not just physical security. Focusing exclusively on a very popular desire for revenge … is likely to provide too little liberty and unity to be a sensible policy."[23] Since terrorist groups need to move money to multiple cells to help sustain their operations, attacking their finances or following financial leads once terrorists are captured has provided effective results. But there are challenges. The financial system known in the Islamic world as *hawala* exists outside the regulated international financial system. Individuals in Islamic communities around the world serve as middle men and facilitate the transfer of cash that is not taxed, recorded, or registered by banks. These informal *hawala* networks remain largely outside government control, and monitoring them presents a significant challenge to closing terrorist financial exchanges.

Countering ideology: Counter-terrorism is just as much about "hearts and minds" as it is about policing and intelligence. It requires taking calculated actions that don't alienate Muslims. And it also requires effectively countering the ideology and messages of terrorist groups through what is often referred to as "information operations." This includes the use of a variety of strategies and tools to counter, influence, or disrupt the message and operation of terrorist groups.[24] Local groups are almost always better placed to conduct information operations than the United States. In addition to building local police and intelligence capacity, dealing with al Qa'ida also requires countering its ideological appeal. This includes countering the continued resonance of their message, their ability to attract recruits and replenish their ranks, and their capacity for continual regeneration and renewal. To do so, the U.S. needs to better understand the mindset and minutia

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[22] Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, p. 241-242.
[23] Philip B. Heymann, *Terrorism and America: A Commonsense Strategy for a Democratic Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 153.
[24] On the use of "information operations" in a military context see, for example, U.S. Department of Defense, *Information Operations*, Joint Publication 3-13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2006).

of the al Qa'ida movement, the animosity and arguments that underpin it, and indeed the regions of the world from which its struggle emanated.

Local groups are more likely to be effective in influencing locals and countering terrorist ideology than the U.S. military or other international actors. It is critical to understand who holds power, who the local population trusts, and where locals get their information—and then to target these forums. In some cases, such as in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas, religious leaders and tribal elders wield most of the power. This means providing assistance to credible indigenous groups, such as Muslim clerics or tribal elders, that can effectively counter jihadist propaganda. These groups do not necessarily have to be supportive of the United States, but they do need to oppose insurgents and have credible influence among the population. Much of this funding may have to be indirect and covert to protect their credibility. Assistance could be directed to indigenous media, political parties, student and youth organizations, labor unions, and religious figures and organizations that meet at least two criteria: (1) they have a notable support base in the local population; and (2) they oppose insurgent groups and insurgent ideology. This approach has some parallels with U.S. efforts during the Cold War to balance the Soviet Union by funding existing political, cultural, social, and media organizations in areas like Central and Eastern Europe.[25]

In Afghanistan, for instance, mosques have historically served as a tipping point for major political upheavals. This led to a major effort by Afghan intelligence officials to focus on mosque leaders. As one Afghan intelligence report in 2006 concluded: "There are 107 mosques in the city of Kandahar out of which 11 are preaching anti-government themes. Our approach is to have all the pro-government mosques incorporated with the process and work on the eleven anti-government ones to change their attitude or else stop their propaganda and leave the area."[26] In addition, in July 2005 the Ulema Council of Afghanistan called on the Taliban to abandon violence and support the Afghan government in the name of Islam. They also called on the religious scholars of neighboring countries – including Pakistan – to help counter the activities and ideology of the Taliban and other insurgent organizations.[27] A number of Afghan Islamic clerics publicly supported the Afghan government and called the jihad un-Islamic.[28] Moreover, the Ulema Council and some Afghan ulema issued fatwas, or religious decrees, that unambiguously oppose suicide bombing. They argued that suicide bombing did not lead to an eternal life in paradise, did not permit martyrs to see the face of Allah, and did not allow martyrs to have the company of 72 maidens in paradise. These efforts were more effective than U.S.-led information operations, such as dropping leaflets.

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[25] See, for example, Angel Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Peter Sickle, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).
[26] Saleh, *Strategy of Insurgents and Terrorists in Afghanistan*, p. 8.
[27] "Religious Scholars Call on Taliban to Abandon Violence," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, July 28, 2005.
[28] "Taliban Claim Killing of Pro-Government Religious Scholars in Helmand," *Afghan Islamic Press*, July 13, 2005.

This strategy was accomplished successfully during the Cold War when applied appropriately. During the Cold War, the United States believed that internal security assistance was critical to prevent certain countries from falling under Soviet influence.[29] The Office of Public Safety, which was established in 1962 in the U.S. Agency for International Development, trained over a million foreign police over its 13-year tenure.[30] President John F. Kennedy, for example, believed that Moscow sought to strengthen its international position by pursuing a strategy of subversion, indirect warfare, and agitation designed to install communist regimes in the developing world. In March 1961, President Kennedy told the U.S. Congress that the West was being "nibbled away at the periphery" by a Soviet strategy of "subversion, infiltration, intimidation, indirect or non-overt aggression, internal revolution, diplomatic blackmail, guerilla warfare or a series of limited wars."[31] He concluded that providing assistance to police and other internal security forces was critical to combat Soviet aggression, since they were the first line of defense against subversive forces. Robert Komer, President Kennedy's key National Security Council staff member on overseas internal security assistance, argued that viable foreign police in vulnerable countries were the necessary "preventive medicine" to thwart Soviet inroads.[32] Komer argued that the police were in regular contact with the population, could serve as an early warning against potential subversion, and could be used to control riots, demonstrations, and subversives before they became serious threats.

VI. Military Force

Military force is sometimes necessary to end terrorist groups, especially when they are engaged in insurgencies. In most cases, however, local forces have been most effective in taking the lead. Local forces – with assistance from intelligence units and Special Operations Forces – can contest areas to regain government presence and control, and then conduct military and civil-military

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[29] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Reappraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); H.W. Brands, *The Devil We Know: Americans and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[30] Charles T. Call, "Institutional Learning Within ICITAP," in Robert B. Oakley, Michael J. Dziedzic, and Eliot M. Goldberg, eds., *Policing the New World Disorder: Peace Operations and Public Security* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1998), p. 317. Also see Martha K. Huggins, *Political Policing: the United States and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 111.

[31] "Special Message to the Congress on the Defense Budget," March 28, 1961, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 236.

[32] Quoted in William Rosenau, "The Kennedy Administration, U.S. Foreign Internal Security Assistance and the Challenge of 'Subterranean War,' 1961-63," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn 2003, pp. 80. Also see Maxwell D. Taylor, "Address at International Police Academy Graduation," December 17, 1965, USAID Press Release.

programs to expand the control and edge out terrorists.[33] The focus should be on consolidating and holding ground that is clearly pro-government; deploying forces to conduct offensive operations; and holding territory once it is cleared. Holding territory has often been the most difficult facet of "clear and hold" strategies used against al Qa'ida and other groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Sufficient numbers of forces are needed to hold territory once it is cleared, or insurgents can retake it. Local forces may not always be government forces, as the United States discovered in Afghanistan and Iraq. This suggests that the most vulnerable hubs of al Qa'ida may sometimes be local sub-state actors.

When insurgent groups have ended, nearly half of the time they negotiated a settlement with the government. One quarter of the time the group achieved victory, and just under a quarter of the time insurgent groups were defeated by military forces. A negotiated settlement with al Qa'ida is unlikely, since governments in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia would never agree to this outcome. This means that in cases where al Qa'ida is involved in an insurgency, limited military force may be necessary. Force was necessary in Afghanistan in 2001, for example, to target al Qa'ida's base of operations. But U.S. military and intelligence forces acted primarily in support of the Northern Alliance, who conducted most of the ground fighting.[34] In the majority of cases, the United States should avoid direct, large-scale military force in the Muslim world to target al Qa'ida, or it risks increasing local resentment and creating new terrorist recruits.

The U.S. focus outside of its borders should be to work by, with, and through indigenous forces. As some jihadists have argued, direct military engagement with the United States has been good for the jihadi movement. It rallies the locals behind the movement and pits the fight between Islam and the West. One of al Qa'ida's primary objectives, then, is "to put America's armies, which occupy the region and set up military bases in it without resistance, in a state of war with the masses in the region. It is obvious at this very moment that it stirs up movements that increase the jihadi expansion and create legions among the youth who contemplate and plan for resistance."[35]

In addition, outside forces can rarely win insurgencies for local forces. First, outside military forces are unlikely to remain for the duration of any counterterrorist effort, at least as a major combatant

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[33] The clear, hold, and build section draws extensively from Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006); Joseph D. Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN*, JSOU Report 05-2 (Hurlburt Field, Fla.: Joint Special Operations University, 2005).
[34] On the overthrow of the Taliban regime see Gary Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005); Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2002); Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al Qa'ida* (New York : Crown Publishers, 2005); Bob Woodward, Bush At War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).
[35] Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, p. 20.

force. This is especially true where terrorist groups are involved in an insurgency. Insurgencies are usually of short duration only if the indigenous government collapses at an early stage. An analysis of all insurgencies since 1945 shows that successful counterinsurgency campaigns last for an average of 14 years, and unsuccessful ones last for an average of 11 years. Many also end in a draw, with neither side winning. Insurgencies can also have long tails: approximately 25 percent of insurgencies won by the government and 11 percent won by insurgents last more than 20 years.[36] Since indigenous forces eventually have to win the war on their own, they must develop the capacity to do so. If they don't develop this capacity, indigenous forces are likely to lose the war once international assistance ends. Second, local forces usually know the population and terrain better than external actors, and are better able to gather and exploit intelligence. Third, a lead outside role may be interpreted by the population as an occupation, eliciting nationalist reactions that impede success.[37] Fourth, a lead indigenous role can provide a focus for national aspirations and show the population that they – and not foreign forces – control their destiny. Competent governments that can provide services to their population in a timely manner can best prevent and overcome terrorist groups.

VII. Conclusion

The good news about countering al Qa'ida is that its probability of success in actually overthrowing any governments is close to zero. While bin Laden enjoys some popular support in much of the Muslim world, this support does not translate into the mass support that organizations such as Hezbollah enjoy in Lebanon. But the bad news is that U.S. efforts against al Qa'ida have not been successful. They have now lasted longer than America's involvement in World War II. Despite some successes against al Qa'ida, the U.S. has not significantly undermined its capabilities. Al Qa'ida has been involved in more attacks in a wider geographical area since September 11, 2001, including in such European capitals as London and Madrid. Its organizational structure has also evolved, making it a dangerous enemy. This means that the U.S. strategy in dealing with al Qa'ida must change. A strategy based on military force has not been effective. Based on al Qa'ida's organizational structure and modus operandi, only a strategy based on careful police and intelligence work is likely to be effective.

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[36] See Appendix A in David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV, *War By Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, RAND, 2008). On time, also see Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, p. 10.
[37] David M. Edelstein, "Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), p. 51.